

KAISER HOPES TO END TRENCH DEADLOCK

German Armies Behind Front
Train for a War of
Movement

By HILAIRE BELLOC

(Author of "Elements of the Great War" and Britain's Most Distinguished
Military Critic)

POLITICALLY the great interest of the war during the present week has been the surrender of Northern Russia. But the military interest, which is supreme, for it must in the end control even the political arrangements which have been set up between the German government and Bolshevik leaders, lies in a discussion upon "the war of movement" which the German high command is apparently planning to put into effect if possible upon the Western as well as upon the Eastern front.

The capitulation of Northern Russia has taken place, of course, without any consultation with its people or attempt to determine their wishes in the matter. It was signed merely by the small cosmopolitan group of men who are masters through terrorism in Petrograd; some of whom are actually agents of the German government, and all of whom are entirely indifferent to any national feeling for Russia.

Wants States She
Can Dominate

Its object is to maintain these people in such power as they have been able to set up in what used to be the Russian capital, and its effect is to complete a long belt of small and weak states, nominally independent, which Germany and Austria are setting up in Eastern Europe. These they will dominate politically and economically and from them they hope to draw military strength, so that in practice, if they remain with their present boundaries, they will form parts of a great Central European empire under the leadership and domination of Prussia and its rulers.

These small states are Livonia, Esthonia, Courland, Lithuania, a Germanized Rumania (with a new king, appointed by Germany, and probably would be one of Prussia's ruling family), and the Ukraine.

Prussia Fears
a Free Poland

One of the chief objects in setting up all these small states—especially the last named—is to create a weak and diminished Poland. This is because Poland is a real nationality, strongly patriotic, virile and possessing the elements of national greatness and power, so that its resurrection as a state is one of the things which Prussia most seriously dreads.

But all these arrangements depend for their permanency upon what happens on the Western front. If the Germans can maintain their line in the West, and can succeed in forcing the Allied Powers to give them a peace which leaves them strong and the undisputed masters of Central Europe, they would obviously have won the war. They would, of course, evacuate Belgium and Northern France; they would hold a referendum with pleasure in Alsace-Lorraine, and they probably would even tell Austria to give back to Italy the territory now occupied and the Trentino, that Italian valley in the Alps which Austria now rules. But in spite of these concessions they would come out of such an arrangement with powers and re-

sources which would insure that they would be the future masters of Europe.

Can Play for Small
Stake or Big One

There are two ways in which they can attain this end: a minimum way and a maximum way.

The minimum way is to hold the present siege line from the Channel to the Adriatic intact, while they continue to increase the pressure upon Great Britain and the vital communications of the Allies by a larger and more effective use of the submarine. They hope that even if they have no better success than this it will be a sufficient power in the field to upset the new balance created by the defection of Russia from the Allied cause, and in spite of any assistance which America can give across three thousand miles of submarine-infested ocean.

But the maximum way would be far more satisfactory to the Germans, because it would be shorter and because it would be infinitely more conclusive. It consists in breaking up the Western line and restoring the "war of movement" which ended on the west when the Germans were pinned into their trenches from Switzerland to the sea following their retreat after the battle of the Marne.

Nothing but Guesses
As to Their Plans

No one can possibly tell whether the Germans intend or not to make this attempt in the near future. There have been plenty of guesses, but they have been guesses only. German prisoners taken by Allied forces in raids in the last weeks have alluded in a large way to the imminence of such a stroke, and expert opinion on the Allied side is, upon the whole, that some such attempt will be made. But some of the most acute observers of the war are still of the opinion that—in spite of, perhaps because of, the wide advertisement that this coming offensive has been given from the German side—it is a bluff; that the Central Empires will not at this time risk the very heavy losses which such an experiment would entail and the possible collapse of their whole structure to which such losses might lead.

The real crux in the judgment of this question is between those who think that the Germans must make such an effort because of the moral and material condition of their civilian population, and those who think they can afford to postpone it in spite of the increasing strain upon their peoples, and that they can keep the population in order in spite of any discontent which may develop during the strain of waiting.

Meanwhile observation from the air informs us that the Germans are rehearsing their troops in formations for use in a "war of movement" behind their lines, that they are using large bodies of men in this, probably in coordination with their new tanks, and certainly with an elaborate new organization prepared for use when and if a change can be made from the trench warfare of the last three years.

Trains Armies
For Open Warfare

The belief that the Germans ever voluntarily abandoned the war of movement in the West is part of a very general error into which the present writer fell in common with most others when this novel development of trench warfare first appeared. That error is the conception that this new phase was part of a deliberate plan already established in the enemy's mind.



The shaded portion of the map shows the belt of former Russian territory for which Prussia is reaching out. Her plan is to create a belt of small states, which shall all be so weak that she can easily dominate them in every way and absorb them when she wishes. The boundaries given are only approximate, since in many cases they have not yet been definitely fixed.

To entertain such an error would be, as subsequent study and evidence have proved, to misunderstand the nature of the war and the psychology of the opposing belligerents.

Trench warfare was certainly not foreseen by the Allies, as certainly it was not foreseen by the enemy. He had prepared nothing for it. His just appreciation of the value of machine guns and his initial overwhelming superiority therein were based upon the idea that the machine gun would be invaluable in the check of local counter offensives and even in the prosecution of rapid attack. Its value for permanent defence he seized when he was constrained to that permanent defence. It is greatly to his credit that he should so rapidly have appreciated the new conditions; but he did not plan them.

All Plans Were
For Open Warfare

All his plan was for a rapid offensive, in which he was more or less certain of an immediate or overwhelming success; accident and circumstance external to his design were his tutors in this matter. The trench warfare, which was established in the third week of September, 1914, was imposed upon the Germans by their defeat, and so far from being a complete system organ-

ized and thought out before the outbreak of the war, nearly all its features developed as novelties.

That almost inevitable tendency by which we see the difficulties of our own side in war and forget the corresponding difficulties of the opponent led opinion among the Allies to a serious overestimate of the enemy's calculations in the matter of defensive war. If we put ourselves in the position of the German higher command we shall see things from a very different light. Here was a General Staff which had for forty years planned and perfected aggressive war. It took for granted—and there was no violent exaggeration in such a view—that complete victory would be achieved immediately.

A command in this mood finds itself and is stupefied to find itself caught, held, hurled back and at last pinned by those inferior forces which not a week before it had regarded as a mere prey. That the defeated party in such a catastrophe should produce and develop a tenacious defensive, should save what it could and should cling to the first opportunity for a halt, is no more than the crude necessity of its position. That it should have foreseen and prepared for it is neither evidence nor probability.

Trenches were, indeed, dug upon the Aisne position by troops still in the rear after the first news of the Marne was appreciated by the German command, but not before.

Likely to Strike
British Near Cambrai

In a former article I discussed the various sectors upon which a German attack might take place. It now appears that the probabilities are that the offensive will be launched, if it is launched at all, against the British front and toward the southern end of that front, but it is almost certain that it will be accompanied also by very strong demonstrations made against the French line at the same time.

The reason that the military people think this form of attack is probable is not that any special concentration of German forces is as yet observable on this sector. But the Germans certainly believe that the British would be especially handicapped if a war of movement could be restored against them. They admit that the new British armies have arrived with unexpected rapidity at a very high state of efficiency—a thing which the Germans long believed to be impossible for troops raised suddenly out of purely civilian material and for staffs with no long tradition behind them—but

Prussia Plans to Set Up Belt of
Weak States on Soil
of Russia

Copyright 1918—The Tribune Association

nevertheless they believe that this efficiency has been developed only in connection with and will be valuable only for use in siege war or a war of positions.

They argue that the British have had no experience in a war of movement; that their junior officers would find the novel task of handling troops in such a war too heavy for them, and that the newly constructed staffs would not be able to conform themselves to it and to meet its problems. If such a war of movement could be restored, therefore, the Germans believe that it would result in disaster to the Allies through a crumbling up of the British sector.

Better Chance on
Southern Wing

They would have a better chance to break through the lines and establish a war of movement on the southern end of that sector—that is in the areas around St. Quentin and Cambrai—than in the northern part, because at the southern the soils are much drier; because a rupture at this point would immediately threaten Paris; because though the German communications are on the whole better in the north, the comparison is to their advantage to the south, where the British communications are longer and therefore more difficult than they are at the north.

All this is, of course, pure conjecture, but it is conjecture based upon the only elements of calculation which are available.

Allies Winning
Air Supremacy

Meanwhile a very great deal would depend upon the comparative strength of the opposing forces in the air during the fighting season which is now about to open. So far as developments have yet taken place the superiority is clearly upon the Allied side in this respect, and would seem to be increasing.

There has been a continuous and a more and more intensive bombardment from the air of the German western traffic and munitions centres during the last two months. Treves, an exceedingly important depot and passage for communications, has been heavily bombed six times in five weeks; the vital junction just outside of Thionville in Lorraine has suffered in much the same fashion; and altogether there have been in less than seven weeks some fifty heavy bombardments delivered from Allied airplanes upon special objectives behind the German front, especially upon munition works and railway stations.

Nothing corresponding to this has yet been attempted by the enemy behind the Allied line. If the present indications may be taken as a guide for the future it would seem as if in this vital matter of work in the air the Allies were really establishing a supremacy, but we do not know whether the enemy may not be merely holding back heavy forces of airplanes, or even some new types of superior effectiveness, for use in a special effort in the air to coincide with the opening of his attack on the trenches, if this is made.

Germans in West
Must Fight Alone

Theoretically the disappearance of the Eastern front as a military factor and the release of much of the greater part of the men watching it should allow the Central Powers to throw the whole weight of their armies into the attack or series of attacks upon the lines in Northern France. But in practice this attack will have to rely upon German troops almost alone. The Austrian forces

have already been heavily reduced by the disasters which overtook them in the early part of the war. Their available resources are now mainly occupied upon the Italian front, and economic conditions throughout Austria-Hungary are worse even than those from which the German empire now suffers. Moreover, the civilian population is far less homogeneous and more discontented than is that in Germany itself.

Some observers also have argued that the new commitment of the Central Empires to action in the East, which they assumed when they began marching toward Petrograd in the north and toward Kiev in the south, will further hamper them and deter them from any attack in the West. But this is error. There is no Russian army in existence—only a certain number of men, wearing uniform it is true, but without discipline, largely without arms and enormously reduced in numbers by desertions.

Small Force Only
Used in Russia

The forces which the Central Empires are now sending forward into the heart of what once was Russia are quite small. A certain proportion of cavalry, accompanied by artillery, is sufficient for the work, supported as they are by the reduced units of poor grade infantry which have been found all that was necessary for use on the Eastern front in recent months. Dvinsk, for instance, was abandoned without a struggle and already far more than a thousand guns, formerly provided by the Allies to aid Russia, have been given up without a blow. There is no real fighting.

The only task of the small invading armies, in fact, is the garrisoning and policing of such districts as Germany chooses to have them occupy. And as the Ukraine is already in sympathy with the Germans, and as the local leaders and German agents to the north have readily surrendered all that was asked to the Central Empires, the German commanders may put the limit of the advance of their armies exactly where they choose.

Germans Tire
of Poison Gas

A detail of military interest of some importance in the past week has been the efforts which are being indirectly made by the German government to reestablish the convention prohibiting the use of poison gas in war. They are working through the Red Cross, and their motives are obvious.

It was they who first introduced this abomination in modern war not quite three years ago, when they sent a flood of yellow chlorine drifting down toward the Allied trenches, in April, 1915. It took the Allies by surprise, and the Germans very nearly succeeded in breaking the Allied line with it at the point where the British and French armies then joined north of Ypres. The line was only saved by the heroism and terrific losses of the Canadians.

For a long time the Germans enjoyed a complete superiority over the Allies in this form of attack, but the superior civilization of the Allies in this, as in every other experiment tried in this war, not only caught up with them but passed them. The Allies to-day have not only better gas (more deadly and less easy to detect and resist), but a better protection against gas than the enemy, and their superiority in this is rapidly increasing.

Such are the reasons and the only reasons for the German move, and as its motives are as perfectly clear as they are crude it will not succeed.